

REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA HUMPHREY SCHOOL
FARM-TO-SCHOOL POLICY FELLOWS WORK GROUP

To the Farm-to-School Leadership Team
June 20, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

The Humphrey School's Policy Fellows Program is a leadership development program for mid-career professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds and sectors. Housed within the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance in the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, the Policy Fellows Program has provided practical training in public affairs leadership for emerging leaders for over twenty years. The culmination of this nine-month leadership and professional development experience is a group project in which a small circle of Fellows focuses on a timely public policy issue and connects with community partners and other stakeholders to positively influence this issue.

Six individuals in the 2010-2011 Policy Fellows cohort chose to focus on barriers and opportunities related to growing participation in farm-to-school programming in Minnesota. Promoting the incorporation of locally grown and sustainably produced food into school meals is a powerful tool that has multiple, significant benefits. Positive impacts of farm-to-school programs include combating childhood obesity, promoting healthy living, enhancing learning ability, strengthening local economies, supporting small-scale farm operations, and lessening the environmental footprint of the food production system.

Although the concept of farm-to-school is not new and in fact the number of schools participating has grown significantly in recent years (from 10 school districts in Minnesota engaged in farm-to-school in 2006 to 123 districts in 2010), the potential for expanding access to and participation in farm-to-school programs statewide remains vast. In order to explore the factors influencing the success of farm-to-school, the Fellows conducted interviews with community partners representing a range of critical perspectives on this issue. Interviews with local food experts, school food service staff, farmers, distributors, state and local government representatives, school administrators and technical assistance providers explored challenges and opportunities related to growing the success of farm-to-school in Minnesota.

The list of individuals who were interviewed is included on page 10. Interviewees were each asked to respond from their own perspective to a set of five general questions:

- What do you see as the biggest barriers to expanding farm-to-school programs in Minnesota?
- What do you see as opportunities for action to expand farm-to-school programming in Minnesota?
- What resources have you found most helpful? Where do you go for your information?
- If you had unlimited time and resources for this program what would you do differently?
- Is there anything else you think we should know? Or anything we did not ask that we should be considering?

The results of these interview conversations were compiled and an assessment of relevant reports, resources and recent publications was completed in order to identify the most significant challenges inhibiting the growth of farm-to-school in Minnesota and to develop a set of high-level policy recommendations. The list of reports that was reviewed in the environmental scan, including publication date, author and a brief description, is included on page 7. The group's findings and recommendations were shared with the full cohort of 2010-2011 Policy Fellows on June 10, 2011 and made available to the interviewees and other interested parties. The report was also shared with the Farm-to-School Leadership Team that, as part of a larger Farm-to-School Network, has been formed to foster a spirit of collaboration and provide an environment conducive to and supportive of Farm-to-School efforts in Minnesota. The statewide Farm-to-School Leadership Team recognizes that by partnering, it provides a state level platform of collaboration to achieve shared goals.

POLICY OBSERVATIONS

Policy-level changes are certainly needed to foster the growth of farm-to-school and provide adequate funding to school districts, community organizations, non-profit entities, and other institutions to support farm-to-school. However, because farm-to-school exists primarily as a grass-roots effort and must be enacted at the local level to be maximally successful, local and state policy changes are equally important as federal policy reforms and ongoing grassroots initiatives. The Policy Fellows have gleaned several important observations related to federal, state, and local policy from our conversations with stakeholders and review of recent relevant reports.

Federal Policy – Two significant developments at the federal level in the past few years will impact the implementation of farm-to-school initiatives at the state levels – the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, signed into law in December of 2010 and the Food Safety Modernization Act, authorized in January 2011. Of note, as part of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, U.S. Department of Agriculture will receive \$5 million to provide Farm-to-School technical assistance and competitive matching grants beginning October 2012.

(For more detail, see the last paragraph from this PDF on the USDA Farm to School website: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/pdf/F2Sleg_history.pdf) However, the implementation and rulemaking processes for both laws are still in development, therefore making it difficult to predict specific implications for farm-to-school. Additionally, the legal landscape is evolving rapidly and the legal implications of these new laws are not well understood at this time. As implementation comes into play in 2012 and 2013, both of these new laws will present opportunities for schools to update local policies and procedures to better align wellness as a core value in the school environment and increase the health and nutrition of the school-age population. Schools will be required to overhaul school menus to align with new federal dietary guidelines. School wellness policies will also need to be revisited as a result of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, which provides an opportunity for School Boards to include support for farm-to-school in revised wellness policies. Additionally reforming federal farm policy to incentivize improving the quality of commodity foods would be extremely beneficial in helping to achieve the goals set out in farm-to-school and the reauthorization of the Federal Farm Bill in 2012 presents another significant opportunity to influence federal policy.

State Policy – Minnesota should develop a statewide farm-to-school policy, which would establish standard definitions and create a shared vision and build common understanding around farm-to-school at all levels. As of November 2010, thirty-three other states have passed farm-to-school legislation of some type:
(http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_177.pdf)

Also, in Spring 2009 the MN state legislature passed a bill declaring, “\$60,000 the first year is for a transfer to the University of Minnesota Extension Service for farm-to-school grants to school districts in Minneapolis, Moorhead, White Earth, and Willmar.” \$15,000 was given to each district to implement farm-to-school.

Local Policy – School board wellness policies should include language to support farm-to-school programs. Identification and coordination of community partners, efforts, logistics, and relationships is key to the success of farm-to-school and best addressed at the local level.

CHALLENGES

Given the diversity and extent of activities currently underway throughout Minnesota, coupled with the lack of a coordinated “clearinghouse” of information related to farm-to-school, it proved quite difficult to determine specific activities that are underway and the level of involvement at different institutions throughout the state. Furthermore, definitions of what constitutes a farm-to-school program can vary dramatically from onsite vegetable gardens, to sourcing apples from a local orchard once a year, to an integrated program with communication strategies and curriculum components. Benchmarking progress and assessing program success is therefore difficult and complicated. Program evaluation mechanisms are also severely lacking, which makes it

all the more difficult to determine progress or even simply which stakeholders are involved in which activities.

The Policy Fellows Workgroup grouped the identified challenges to growing farm-to-school into four main categories. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of barriers named, nor a comprehensive evaluation of needs related to farm-to-school, but rather a high-level assessment of some of the most pressing challenges impacting the expansion of farm-to-school in Minnesota.

Resources

Food service workers have limited budgets and limited time to purchase and prepare fresh and local foods. On-site kitchens lack the physical space required to store and prepare produce items. Many raw foods require processing (i.e., peeling, cutting, shredding, etc.) in order to be menu-ready, which poses an additional challenge to both growers and food service providers. Schools that have the desire and capacity to grow edible products on school grounds may lack sufficient access to productive land on site. Planning food menus around growing seasons is much more time intensive and is best done with advanced planning. Resources are lacking for nutrition education for students, parents, and food service workers. Purchasing fresh and local produce often costs more and results in more cost in staff time needed to sustain a Farm-to-School program.

Policy

Federal, state, and local policies tend to value mass production of commodity crops over crop diversity and specialty crop production. Particularly in Minnesota, farmers are rewarded for production of corn and soybeans over other societal benefits (conservation, carbon sequestration, diversified farming, water quality protection, etc.) Furthermore the federal commodity purchasing system undervalues local purchasing and requires schools to bear the brunt of the additional cost to purchase local food without additional governmental support. Minnesota's decentralized public health system is both an asset and a barrier, as local public health authorities can, on the one hand, more easily meet individual community needs, but on the other hand, public health rules and regulations often vary dramatically across districts and political boundaries. The need for liability insurance can be a barrier for small farmers (food safety assurance and certification is challenging when a farmer lacks staff to help with required documentation). Specialty crop producers also require additional crop insurance, which is an added burden. Operationalization and implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2011 may provide an opportunity to access more assistance for farmers, or could present an additional burden. Rulemaking for the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act is still underway and the next few years will be significant as stakeholders at all levels must adapt to changing regulations at the federal scale. Pending implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 also presents a challenge as establishing wellness as a core mission of schools will require stakeholders to overhaul school menus to align with new federal dietary guidelines, as well as modify curricula and teaching methodology to incorporate wellness as a core component.

Culture and Demand

Foods that students like and that parents want their children to eat are not always in sync. The status quo of heavily processed, cheap calorie diets is difficult to change.

Relationship building and clear lines of communication between farmers and school administrators is needed to support the growth of farm-to-school. An urban/rural divide poses unique challenges in different parts of the state that require local solutions and community-led initiatives. For example, the role for distributors (wholesalers) varies dramatically in urban vs. rural communities (and large vs. small school districts).

Infrastructure and Systems

Product availability is a significant barrier that limits the success and expansion of farm-to-school. There is a general lack of available local product due to insufficient vegetable growers in Minnesota (on a per acre basis, 95% of crops in MN are corn and soybeans). The distribution system is also limited and small farmers are often unwilling to deliver product directly to schools because the volumes of product delivered do not offset the cost of delivery. Minnesota's climate poses a barrier as far as access to year-round fresh produce. Growing seasons limit the products that are available during the school year and many of the fruits and vegetables that young kids are familiar with (i.e., green beans, corn, and carrots) are in season during the summer months when school is not in session. Regional governance and technical support for farmers and school administrators is lacking. There is a large need for training, education, and coordination of school administrators, teachers, food service workers, farmers and distributors. There are no standard definitions for what constitutes a Farm-to-School program or criteria by which the success of Farm-to-School can be evaluated. The benefits and impacts of Farm-to-School on local communities are not well understood. In order to be sustainable, farm-to-school programming needs to be systematized and coordinated to meet local needs and maximize local opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Minnesota's is in a unique position and has the opportunity to greatly influence expansion of farm-to-school at the national scale due to its agrarian economy, an engaged non-profit community that is receptive to collaborative partnerships, supportive elected officials including Congresswoman Betty McCollum (who introduced the National Farm-to-School Act in 2010), among other factors. Collaboration and partnerships that exist could be expanded and/or new partnerships should be explored and developed. Recent grants offered through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) have allowed for several intensive efforts to provide training and research on farm-to-school. The University of MN Extension houses a robust website of resources, communication materials, funding opportunities, and the Farm-to-School Toolkit for School Foodservice (<http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/>).

The following five recommendations were developed based on overall themes that emerged from interview conversations and that appeared multiple times in many of the

reports reviewed. These recommendations are intended to be feasible, first steps and relevant for our primary audience, the Farm-to-School Leadership Team. The Policy Fellows Work Group has no intention of implying that these recommendations should be the only actions pursued and recognizes that the Leadership Team may prioritize other needs, opportunities, or activities. It does appear, however, that the first two recommendations are particularly appropriate for the Leadership Team to pursue and that these actions could have significant and tangible benefits for the growth of farm-to-school statewide.

Recommendation One – Formalize and sustain the Statewide Farm-to-School Leadership Team. All essential stakeholder perspectives should be represented on the Team, including farmers, teachers, school administrators, food service staff, state and local government, and others. One early objective for this Team should be to identify and define the desired outcomes of Farm-to-School programs in Minnesota.

Recommendation Two – Create regional hubs to provide localized technical support and training for farmers and school administrators. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) can serve as a model for best practices in providing regional assistance, as can the “Food Hub Center” within the National Good Food Network (<http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs>). Identify regional hubs that could provide storage, freezing and food preparation infrastructure, as well as support staff that can serve as a dedicated resource for community members.

Recommendation Three - Increase education and training support, including training to farmers on food safety regulations, liability concerns, marketing and distribution, as well as nutrition education for students, parents and food service directors.

Recommendation Four – Improve public understanding of the benefits of farm-to-school. Specifically, a more comprehensive economic impact analysis of farm-to-school programs statewide is needed to demonstrate and analyze the total impacts of farm-to-school programs on public health, local and regional economies, learning environment and behavior, etc. While some reports have stated that programs provide a large economic boost in local communities (for every \$1 spent on local food in schools, up to \$3 is generated in the local economy through the multiplier effect), economic impact studies to date have been limited in scale and scope, and a more comprehensive assessment of the local economic impacts of farm-to-school on a statewide basis is needed.

Recommendation Five – Create a statewide legislative advocacy campaign to increase funding from the state of Minnesota for farm-to-school programming. The request to the state legislature would be for funding to cover the cost of a statewide marketing campaign or regional-scale pilot project that could serve as a replicable model.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: Reports, Trainings, Curricula, and Resources

Publication Date	Author/Program	Title	Description
May 2011	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	Grower Perspectives on Farm to School in Minnesota: A Survey of Interested Farmers, Ranchers and Other Producers	This report summarizes responses from 67 individuals self-identified as producers. Survey highlights both current participation as well as potential interest among producers in Farm to School programs in Minnesota. This report highlights challenges that producers identify as perceived barriers to Farm to School participation.
April 2011	Minnesota Rural Partners, Inc. Rural Urban Connections Project with funding from USDA Rural Development	Local and Regional Foods in Minnesota	“This report highlights strategies currently employed throughout Minnesota to build and strengthen local and regional food systems through production, distribution, processing, consumer education, and marketing of local foods.” This report provides an overview of consumer demand, education and outreach efforts in Minnesota highlighting the work of SHIP and the Great Trays program.
March 2011	Annual Report Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives	Great Trays: Healthy School Meals for Minnesota Kids	MN Great Tray’s Partnership was formed in 2010 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support schools with incentives to join a statewide purchasing cooperative and receive skill-based trainings The Annual Report is a collection of local stories of school nutrition directors around the state to inform the work of the program.
March 2011	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and MN School Nutrition Association	Farm to School Minnesota: Third Annual Survey of School Foodservice Leaders	This report summarizes responses from foodservice leaders in 165 districts representing 70% of MN K-12 student population. Survey provides highlights of perceived opportunities and challenges to growing farm-to-school programs in Minnesota.
January 2011	Chelsey Jo Huisman, Master’s Thesis	Farm to School Initiative: An Agenda for Action, A Case Study on the Influence of Public Interest Groups on the Farm to School Policy Agenda in Minnesota	This qualitative study used a case study approach to explore how public interest groups influence and shape MN’s state Farm to School policy agenda.

2010	Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Grant	Building Minnesota's Farm to School Policy and Infrastructure through UMN Extension and Community Partnerships: Final Report of Eight Regional Farm to Cafeteria Workshops	<p>This final report provides an overview of the SARE program accomplishments including the following successful outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and coordination of eight Farm to Cafeteria workshops engaging more than 600 Minnesotans which led to numerous new partnerships and initiatives. ▪ Meetings with 100+ Community Nutrition Educators (CNEs) within each of the twelve Simply Good Eating regions. University of Minnesota Extension Simply Good Eating and SNAP-Ed support for the efforts to expand Farm to School across Minnesota. Community Nutrition Educators educate and share materials that reinforce the health and nutritional benefits of Farm to School in local communities. ▪ Incorporated Farm to School messaging into Go Wild with Fruits & Veggies! – a comprehensive program that encourages students in grades 3-5 to eat more fruits and vegetables and become more physically active. ▪ UMN Extension new farm-to-school website and management of the farm-to-school toolkit for school foodservice; ▪ Increase in farmers interested in selling their products to schools and a new online wholesale database; ▪ Food safety fact sheet
August 2010	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	Definition of Farm to School	<p>“Farm2School is an initiative that links children to nearby small and mid-size farms and ranches that produce fresh, healthy and minimally processed foods that are served at their schools.” This fact sheet lays out the Farm to School goals, values and attributes.</p>
April 2010	University of Minnesota Extension and Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture	How Much Impact Can Farm to School Programs Have on a Regional Economy?	<p>This is a study of the economic impacts of farm to school programs in the Region Five Development District (Morrison, Todd, Wadena, Cass and Crow Wing counties). The project team worked to estimate the potential demand for local food products and to assess the ability of local farmers to meet the demand. This study found the potential economic impact of farm to school programs in the Region 5 counties range from \$23,000 for a monthly special meal to \$323,000 for sourcing a large amount of easily adapted products.</p>

October 31, 2010	Lisa Gemlo, Minnesota Department of Health	Farm to School: An Overview of Policy and Training Opportunities in Minnesota	Provides an environmental scan of federal, state and local farm to school efforts outlining the primary organizations in Minnesota involved in active technical assistance of Farm to School work. The report provides a thematic summary of state farm to school policies to inform stakeholders interested in pursuing a legislative response to farm to school in MN.
January 2009	A Policy Options Brief by the Public Health Law Center	Promoting Fruits and Vegetables in School: Policy Challenges and Opportunities in a Complex Food Environment	“This policy brief examines the Minnesota school environment, identifies challenges and limitations, and suggests promising policy opportunities in four areas where persistent challenges have impeded progress”
2009	Department of Health	Statewide Health Improvement Program	Awarded \$47 million to MN communities to help lower the number of Minnesotans who use tobacco or are overweight.
January 2006	JoAnne Berkenkamp, IATP	Making the Farm/School Connection: Opportunities and Barriers to Greater Use of Locally Grown Produce in Local Schools	This report looks at motivating factors and necessary conditions for the increased sourcing of locally sourced produce. The report outlines three main challenges to the growth of farm to school programs in Minnesota: 1) improving communications between schools and distributors; 2) establishing the experiential educational opportunities as a core component of Farm to School programs; 3) limited state-wide data about school districts’ interest in incorporating more local produce into their food stream.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED: Completed in Spring 2011

First	Last Name	Title	Organization
Margaret	Adamek	Founder and Principal	Terra Soma Consulting Services
Mary	Anderson	Food Service Director	Wayzata School District
Kathryn	Draeger	Statewide Director	Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
Carrie	Frank	Food & Nutrition Director	Dover Eyota Schools
Natasha	Frost	Staff Attorney	Public Health Law Center
Lisa	Gemlo	Farm to School Planner	Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
Collie	Graddick	Facilitator	The Co-op Project
Jim	Groskopf	Food Service Manager	Saint Paul Public Schools
Stephanie	Heim	Farm to School Coordinator	University of Minnesota Extension
Paul	Huginin	Planning Program Supervisor	Minnesota Department of Agriculture – MN Grown
Becky	Jergenson	Assistant to MDA Commissioner	Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Jane	Jewett	Information Exchange Program Associate	Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture
Jeanette	Johnson-Reed	Food Safety Coordinator	Minnesota Department of Education
Stephen	Jones	Superintendent of Schools	Sibley East

Linda	Kingery	Executive Director	Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
Lynn	Mader	Senior Program Associate	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)
June	Mathiowetz	Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator	City of Minneapolis
Marry	Marrow	Staff Attorney	Public Health Law Center
Gary	Pahl	Farmer	Pahl's Market
Duane	Pfleiger	Vice President	Bix Produce
Greg	Reynolds	Farmer	Riverbend Farms
Michele	Schermann	Research Fellow	University of Minnesota – Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering
Caroline	van Schaik	Community Based Food Systems Organizer	Land Stewardship Project
Aimee	Witteman	Environment Program Officer	McKnight Foundation